

Partners in Preparedness Conference Notes
April 10-11, 2007
Eric Holdeman, Director King County OEM

The following are conference notes taken by Eric Holdeman at the 2007 Partners in Preparedness Conference held in Tacoma, Washington, April 10-11, 2007. Remember these are notes, and not a transcript!

Dennis Mileti—spoke about mega disasters in a plenary session. In mega disasters no one will be able to help people where they are, because you can't get there [This is the issue I talk about when discussing the Seattle Fault Earthquake scenario and how downtown Seattle could be cut off from every which direction].

Mega Disasters don't have quick recoveries.

Objective Risk is the risk scientists perceive.

You need to have people self-determine what their readiness will be. People will choose the lesser of two evils when they receive conflicting messages.

We must match our efforts and funds to the risks we face. States have to manage their own risks as if they are their own nation. Instead, states are filling out forms to get money from DHS and FEMA.

Risk perceptions—We think in human time. If you have not experienced it, you don't have to worry about it. This measuring time in human scale is not realistic.

Whatever it is that you do, you cannot do it alone, you need expert advice. Advice based in science, science in all its forms, not from politicians.

We need to stop being reactive to individual voters. Laws passed after events are political knee jerk reactions.

People act as though citizens are the problem and organizations are the solution. In reality, organizations are the problem, not the citizens. He believes that the key disaster kit items citizens need following an earthquake are crowbars and gloves to rescue one another.

We need performance based mitigation. We need to abandon reliance on building codes. How many people might die? Is it acceptable? Different levels of protection should be expected.

No following the building code is the key element.

We don't have sufficient cash reserves for mega disasters. Can you have all-hazards insurance? Can we reduce insurance rates for those who do mitigation?

Dennis Mileti—Spoke at a break out session entitled, "A Conversation with Dennis Mileti."

Emergency managers need to stop doing emergency management planning 40 hours a week. Instead you need to take long lunches and extended breaks at which you create new partnerships across the public and private sectors.

We need to get scientists and practitioners out of their silos. And, we need electeds who are champions, who will take advantage of windows of opportunity [that would be those times immediately following a disaster when there is political motivation to do something.]

Windows of opportunity don't last forever. Studies have shown that following a disaster the public's interest rapidly wanes after two years (unless it is kept alive). For politicians that window is only six months.

California is going to do an extensive disaster preparedness survey of their population. They are spending \$700K+ on this effort. You need to stop having people self-evaluate how prepared they are for disasters and ask specific questions like, "How much water have you stored?"

He quoted someone else in saying, "History does not repeat itself, people just keep making the same mistakes."

Dennis believes that there is an "Iron Law of Perception." There are not real truths, only perceived truths.

He recommended a book, Wellington, "After the Quake" as a good text for reconstruction planning.

Climate change: Natural disasters will be more frequent, more rainfall, [look at the Northeast's Storm of this past week], with more flooding and hurricanes. To change the future we will need a revolution in thinking. He does not believe that the United States will be proactive in preparing for the impacts.